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New Research Points to the Benefits of Exercise on the Brain

BY LAURA BARKAN, *PARK SCHOOL PARENT*

For decades, we've heard how important exercise is for the body. In the past few years, however, studies have proliferated showing the profound effects exercise can have on the brain.

According to Dr. John Ratey, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of the compelling 2008 book, *Spark, The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, "...the real reason we feel so good when we get our blood pumping is that it makes the brain function at its best, and in my view, this benefit of physical activity is far more important... than what it does for the body."

What should we know as parents and educators as we strive to develop our children's minds to their fullest and happiest?

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Students in Kat Callard's Grade II class practice vinyasa yoga poses.

Using Technology in the Classroom to Enhance Learning

BY STANLEY SHAW, *Park Parent Editorial Board*



Proud third-graders demonstrate their new iPads.

At the February Park Parents' Association meeting, several faculty members took time away from their classrooms to show parents how they are incorporating technology into their teaching.

"Our focus in technology this year is to create a new baseline for how technology impacts teaching and learning," says Raymond Stewart, Director of Information Technology. "We are continuing to investigate how technology can really support a deeper understanding of information and the world around us."

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Grade I teacher Sarah Rose reflected on the essentials of her teaching, and posed an overarching question: “To a certain extent, good books, a number line, and eager students are all you need; but how can we use technology to enhance learning?” Kindergarten and Grade I teachers can now use networked LCD projectors and document cameras in each classroom to display reading passages, student work, or as a supplement to the time-tested easel and chart paper. Sarah projects digitized versions of textbooks to illustrate concepts step-by-step, such as sorting a collection of objects into two groups. Even a simple innovation such as digitally recording students as they read aloud, or as they verbalize their approach to a math problem, can serve multiple teaching goals. Teachers can listen to students over time to assess progress, and children can get feedback by hearing themselves read, or by listening to the cadence of someone reading a book that is “just right.”

Peter Bown (Grade III) described a one-to-one iPad pilot project that will begin this spring, in which each Grade III student will use an iPad in support of the math, language arts, and social studies curriculum. Peter acknowledged the “daunting” nature of the pilot, “With the iPad, the possibilities are endless, but our goal is to allow students to create and interact with written, visual, and audio information in new ways.” Faculty researched use of iPads in classrooms nationally and culled the best “apps” from over 160 candidates. Teachers can individualize instruction through the selection of “apps” on the device, or by specifying the number ranges or skills to be used in math practice. For the social studies unit on the Northwest Coast, students will explore combinations of different media, such as supplementing poetry with images and audio from the Pacific Northwest.

In the Upper Division, math teacher Elaine Hamilton showed several examples of how technology can help students collaborate and demonstrate understanding. Google Docs (first introduced in Grade IV) and other web or cloud-based collaborative tools are used extensively for real-time feedback from faculty and fellow students alike. Students create online “Wikis” that integrate what they have learned about a particular topic into a written, dynamic document. In testing, students may be asked to create a video to narrate how they solved a problem. “All of these are wonderful ways for students to personalize their learning, dig deeper, and demonstrate their mastery of subjects,” says Elaine.

According to Raymond, “the presentations illustrated how pedagogy drives innovation.” Each classroom vignette touched upon recurrent themes of making both teaching and learning more differentiated, experiential and collaborative, and provided fascinating glimpses into how our children’s educations are enriched through the thoughtful application of technology. 🌱